

June 7, 2022

Chair Michel Rodrigues
Vice Chair Cindy Friedman
Senator Patrick O'Connor

Chair Aaron Michlewitz
Vice Chair Ann Margaret Ferrante
Representative Todd Smola

Re: Please Support Health Equity Priorities in the FY23 Budget

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Friedman, Vice Chair Ferrante, Senator O'Connor, and Representative Smola:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA), we would like to thank you for your careful attention to public health needs in the FY23 budget. We appreciate that both the House and Senate budgets include funding for the Mass in Motion Program, language creating a true common application for state benefits, and increased funding for rental support programs, among other important investments.

As the Commonwealth continues to respond to the immediate and long-term impacts of the pandemic, it's essential that budget investments directly address the inequitable impacts of the pandemic on communities of color, low income residents, immigrant communities, and others that have long experienced marginalization have. We ask for your support for the following priorities:

Accelerating Improvements to the Local & Regional Public Health System

- **Adopt SENATE funding level of \$15M to support local and regional boards of health (4512-2022)**
 - The Commonwealth's decentralized approach to delivering public health services leads to extreme variability and inequities across municipalities, which puts the entire state at risk.
 - Massachusetts needs a public health system that provides all residents with high-quality public health protections – regardless of their race, income, or zip code.
 - This line item provides the necessary funding for the Public Health Excellence Grant Program at the Department of Public Health and supports 269 municipalities across 41 cross-jurisdictional partnerships.
 - Maintaining this funding level will allow local and regional boards of health to improve public health protections across the state by increasing staff capacity and credentials, increasing efficiencies through cross-jurisdictional sharing agreements.

Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs)

- **Adopt SENATE funding level of \$96.5M to RTAs (1595-6370). Additionally, adopt SENATE outside section 143, allocating \$94M in RTA operating assistance based on FY22 distributions and \$2.5M in grants for means-tested, discounted, and free fare pilot programs.**
 - The 15 RTAs are a lifeline to millions in the 250+ cities and towns beyond the reach of the MBTA, increasing access to medical care, food, and other basic needs, including essential jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - 55% of MA residents live in an RTA service area, and RTA services are especially important for older adults, people with low incomes, and those with disabilities.
 - The Senate funding level and distribution will allow RTAs to experiment with fare structures that reflect the needs of riders in their service area.

Mass Food Trust Program

- **Adopt HOUSE funding level of \$300K to support operating costs of the Massachusetts Food Trust Program (within 2511-0100)**
 - This program, launched in 2018, provides loans, grants, and technical assistance to support new and expanded healthy food retailers in low- and moderate-income communities to increase healthy food access and spur economic growth.
 - These funds support program operations, outreach, and technical assistance, and they leverage in funding included in the Governor’s capital budget. Since 2019, MFTP funds have supported 42 food businesses in 10 counties serving over 229,000 people.

Housing

- **Adopt SENATE line-item language to strengthen the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) (7004-9024)**
 - 60% of Massachusetts renter households earning less than 30% of the area median income (AMI) are severely cost-burdened, needing to spend more than half of their income on housing costs. The same is true for renter households earning between 31-50% AMI.
 - MRVP provides housing stability and security to low-income households across the Commonwealth, including elders, people with disabilities, and families with children. The Senate language includes tenant's utility payments in the calculation of their rent share and caps housing costs at 30%, instead of the current standard of 40% of income. This will help ensure families can better pay for everyday necessities such as transportation, food, and health care.

Thank you for supporting healthy and equitable communities for all Massachusetts residents. If we can be of any assistance to you, please don’t hesitate to contact Oami Amarasingham at 617-584-6721 or oamarasingham@mapublichealth.org.

Sincerely,



Carlene Pavlos



Oamshri Amarasingham, Esq.